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PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #0009 0080933
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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6985
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0797
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4343
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7888
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5449
RHMMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3437
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1237
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000009

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM

SUBJECT: BURMA: HUNGER STRIKES END BUT TROUBLES REMAIN

REF: A. RANGOON 1178

B. RANGOON 1185

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Family members confirmed that detained activists Myo Thant and Zin Lin Aung ended their hunger strike the last week of December. Media reports that their fellow activist, Htin Kyaw, had ended his month-long hunger strike remain unconfirmed. Authorities have dropped all but one of the charges filed against imprisoned pro-democracy activist Thein Swe, but have still not allowed his attorney to attend any hearings or assist in his defense. Seven thousand people in Rakhine State signed a petition addressed to Than Shwe asking for the release of two jailed NLD leaders. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Thi Thi Soe, the sister of detained human rights activist Myo Thant, told us her brother and fellow detainee Zin Lin Aung ended their hunger strike the last week of December. Both men lost a significant amount of weight but are otherwise in good health, she reported. Neither Thi Thi Soe nor opposition lawyer Aung Thein could confirm media reports that Htin Kyaw had ended his hunger strike (reflets).

Htin Kyaw stopped eating on November 30 to protest poor prison conditions and to demand the release of all political prisoners. Myo Thant and Zin Lin Aung started fasting on December 10 in support of Htin Kyaw.

¶3. (C) The parents of detained activist and Embassy contact Thein Swe reported that authorities have dropped five of the six charges pending against their son. Police and judicial authorities told Daw Sein Ti that her son will now only be prosecuted for inciting public unrest, which carried a maximum sentence of two years in prison. Nonetheless, both his mother and lawyer lamented the lack of access authorities have provided the detainee's legal team and family. Lawyer Aung Thein pointed out that the regime prohibited attorneys and family members of Thein Swe from attending a closed hearing in Insein prison on January 2, and expected they would refuse them access at his next hearing scheduled for January 16. Thein Swe was arrested on October 22. Prior to his arrest, he was one of our best contacts in the pro-democracy movement.

¶4. (C) NLD official Han Tha Myint told us that approximately 7,000 people in Rakhine State have signed a petition addressed to Than Shwe, calling on the regime to release two local NLD members. According to an NLD spokesman, the Taunggok township's NLD office circulated the petition among local villages to call for the release of Taunggok party secretary U Khin Hla and deputy secretary Ko Min Aung. Ko

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Min Aung was arrested in September for his role in the pro-democracy demonstrations and has been sentenced to two and a half years in prison. U Khin Hla was arrested in November when his sister brought charges against him stemming from a family dispute. He was sentenced to over four years in prison, despite his sister's attempt to withdraw her complaint. Local party officials were in possession of the petition and have been discussing how to proceed, according to Han Tha Myint.

¶5. (C) Comment. There isn't much that could dissuade Than Shwe from imposing his roadmap on the Burmese people. He clearly does not care about the prospect of a few activists dying from a hunger strike and would probably not even read a petition calling for the release of prisoners, even if it did have thousands of signatures as the NLD claims. His regime can afford to show leniency against pro-democracy activists such as Thein Swe so long as they remain out of circulation until after the referendum for Than Shwe's sham constitution concludes (which might take place by the end of 2008). End Comment.

VILLAROSA